

The Novelist as a Historian: A Study of the Nigerian/Biafran War Account from the Perspective of Chukwuemeka Ikeh's *Sunset at Dawn*

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Abstract

*The novelist is a creator and a creative writer whose foundation is lodged in imaginative thinking. It is in the creative writer's ability to recreate events, which had either taken place or could take place, through the use of fictive characters, and creative use of language. This study therefore introspects the events of the Nigerian/Biafra civil war from the perspective of the novelist as a historian, in doing this the study examines the events of the civil war from the literary perspectives and accounts of a literary giant Chukwu Emeka Ikeh's *Sunset at Dawn*. Data for the study is collected from secondary sources, the text under study and other Nigerian/Biafran war novels, historical books about the civil war, and internet sources. The study adopted the theory of historicism as a frame work. It highlighted the civil war era from the perspective of the writer under study, from the beginning of the conflict to when it became a full-blown war, the killings, starvation, hunger and the end of the war. The study identified some of the remote causes of the war to be the fear of political domination among the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria, deep seated ethnic resentment and acrimony among others. This study recommends that similar situation in future can only be averted through power devolution, all- inclusive leadership style and equitable distribution of the nation's resources.*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Historical Perspectives of Nigeria as a Nation

Before the year 1914 there was no country in the world known as Nigeria. On the other hand, for hundreds of years, there existed within the geographical entity known today as Nigeria people and nations identified as Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa/Fulani, Binnis, Tiv etc (Emefiena, 2013, p.15). "After years of Arab and European slavery and colonization, these and other nearby nations were amalgamated by the British government through the instrumentality of Lord Fredrick Lugard". Crowder qtd in Emefiena, (2013) stated that "Nigeria as a country

has two main histories viz: The history of the people who make up the country and the history of Nigeria as one political entity. The former forms a history of the people and their empires, nations or states is very old, some going back to hundreds of years” (p.15). Agbu (2004) stated that “the indigenous societies predated Nigeria and this consisted of the three largest ethnic groups, the Hausa/Fulani in the north, the Igbo in the southeast, and the Yoruba in the southwest each of which now has a population of not less than 25 million”. The later history of Nigeria is quite recent, the political state known today as Nigeria was born in 1914, Flora Shaw, mistress to Fredrick Lugard coined the name Nigeria earlier in 1897 in the article she wrote in the “Times” of January that year. Flora Shaw saw the designation of the states or areas that made up the south of the present-day Nigeria as Royal Niger Company’s territories thoughtfully she came up with the simple word Nigeria, which encompassed the whole area. In the year 1900 Fredrick Lugard was made the British high commissioner of the protectorate of northern Nigeria, Schwarz (1968). In 1914 when he was made the governor general, he amalgamated the southern and the northern protectorate to become one country, he retained the name Nigeria for the newly created state. This is how numerous pre-existing African states or ethno-political communities with hundreds of different languages came to be recreated by Britain as one single state. Schwarz (ibid) noted that “the arid north who are predominantly Muslims and the tropical south predominantly Christians are different countries.” Nigeria attained political independence from Britain on 1st October 1960, with this came the change of political leadership, the British government relinquished political leadership to Nigerians; with this the stage was set for tribal and ethnic politics. Lasse and Dirk (2014) collaborated this fact by stating that:

“The optimism of decolonization had begun to crumble by mid 1960s paradoxically; the growing participatory options for the population weakened the postcolonial democracy. At the regional level, a system of patronage was created along ethnic lines. At the national level, the three “mega tribes” competed for state resources that had become increasingly lucrative, thanks to the revenue from oil and other commodities. A deepening rift severed the north and southern regions. The eastern region geographically in the countries south east was increasingly isolated in particular. In all regions politicians feared the possible domination of their counterparts from other parts of the country. Federal and national elections developed into fiercely fought battles for power, ballot rigging and other forms of manipulation were omnipresent” (p.173).

Prior to the 1959 general election, there existed three political parties in the three regions of: northern, western, and eastern Nigeria. The political parties were: N.C.N.C, Action Group

The Novelist as a Historian: A Study of the Nigerian/Biafran War Account from the Perspective of Chukwuemeka Ikeh's Sunset at Dawn

and the Northern People's Congress headed by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, chief, Obafemi Awolowo and Sir Ahamadu Bello respectively. N.P.C. was declared the winner of the 1959 general election which ushered in Nigeria's independence and the party promptly formed the government by producing the first prime-minister in the person of Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Belewa. N.C.N.C. came second and produced the ceremonial president Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe. The literary icon Chinua Achebe collaborated Lasse and Dirk, and stated the politico-social malaise of the newly independent country in his book *There was a country*, and stated thus....

Within six years of this tragic colonial manipulation Nigeria became a cesspool of corruption and misrule. Public servants helped themselves freely to the nation's wealth. Elections were blatantly rigged. The subsequent National census was outrageously stage-managed; judges and magistrates were manipulated by the politicians in power. The politicians themselves were pawns of foreign business interest. The social malaise in Nigerian society was political corruption. The structure of the country was such that there was in built power struggle among the ethnic groups, and of course those who were in power wanted to stay in power. The easiest and simplest way to retain it even in a limited area, was to appeal to tribal sentiments, so they were egregiously exploited in the 1950s and 1960s (Achebe, 2011, p.15).

The excesses of the first republic politicians were however checkmated in the wee hours of 15th January 1966 when a group of young Army officers struck and ended the life span of the first republic leaving a good number of political office holders dead. One of the key architects of the coup Major, Emmanuel Ifeajuna in a memo qtd in, Emefiena. (2013) stated thus, as their reasons for the putsch...

The scene had become so corrupt and confused, that while an official could be sacked if it is rumored that he talked to the girlfriend of a minister or the official could loses thousands of pounds without a query being issued to him to answer. So, we kept asking ourselves where lay our salvation? How could a structure be so diseased? Corruption and inefficiency were not only visible everywhere; they were accepted as the way of life. Politics had become the best paying profession...then they were the good time women, the camp followers. An incompetent secretary could get appointed on a fabulous pay with quarters as a matter of priority because she knew some minister or Alhaji. They went about openly offering themselves for trade for the highest bidder, for any job. (p.31)

The January coup was greeted with jubilation by Nigerians who heaved a sigh of relief, but in the later weeks and months there came about speculations that the coup was staged by the over-ambitious Igbo people who want to dominate every facet of Nigeria's national life. On the 29th of July 1966, a group of northern officers in the Nigerian Army staged a counter coup. The head of state and the supreme commander, Major- General J.T.U Aguyi Ironsi was killed alongside his host Lt. Col F.A. Fajuyi, the military governor of western Nigeria, not fewer than two hundred Army officers of Igbo origin lost their lives. The northern officers and soldiers then selected Lieutenant Colonel, Yakubu Gowon as the new head of state. This fact was collaborated by Achebe, (2011) thus...

The weeks following the coup saw easterners attacked both randomly and in organized fashion there seem to be a lust for revenge, which meant an excuse for Nigerians to take out their resentment on the Ibos (sic) who lead the nation in virtually every sector: politics, education, commerce and arts, it was a desperate time soldiers were being used by elements in power to commit a number of crimes against the Ibos. Military officers are rounding people up and summarily executing them especially in the north. We were told by victims fleeing the pogroms. In Lagos where we live, soldiers were also used in target raids of certain places and homes including our own (p.67).

The attack on the Igbo people continued unabated in different parts of Nigeria, the Igbo men/women became a rat that must be annihilated at all cost, this period was a period of mass exodus of the Igbo people from different parts of Nigeria, no place was safe again for the Igbo man except the east, there is no Igbo family that did not get a fair share of the pogrom. Those that are lucky came back home with either one eye missing, a hand or a leg. These ugly events forced Igbo leaders to prevail on the then military governor of the then eastern region, Lieutenant Col Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu to announce the secessionist republic of Biafra on 30th May, 1967, and this led to thirty months' civil war.

1.2.Statement of Problem

The realities of the Nigerian/Biafran civil war fought between 1967 and 1970 is an integral part of Nigeria's postcolonial history which many Nigerians especially those that are distanced from the theatre of the war at the period, and indeed the world in general are yet to understand and appreciate the enormity of the destruction mated against the people of the then eastern region especially the Igbo people by the federal military government of Nigeria led by General Yakubu Gown. It is quite germane to state here that this aspect of Nigeria's postcolonial history had been swept under the carpet by successive Nigerian government, by

expunging history from primary and secondary school curriculum so that this aspect of Nigeria's history is totally obscured and shielded from future generation of Nigerians. This study wishes to see this historical event from the perspectives of the literary writer as a historian. From the perspectives of Chukwuemeka Ikeh's *Sunset at Dawn*. Many literary artists have written and published works about the Nigerian/Biafra civil war these works which are by no means exhaustive include: Elechi Amadi's *Sunset in Biafra* (1973) Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2007) Isidore Okpewo's *The Victims* (1970) and *The last Duty* (1979). These works share a lot in common and are not mere literary works but are indispensable aspect of Nigeria's postcolonial history, which these literary artists re-casted through the use of fictive characters. This study therefore is aimed at looking at the novelist as historians through the novel chosen for this study.

2. Theoretical Frame Work and Review of Related Literature

This study is anchored on the theory of new historicism. New historicism is an extrinsic theory that allows the study of literature from societal, historical and cultural perspectives, thus the literary text is read parallel to none literary texts that stress similar historical issues on times as captured in the literary text. (<https://e-project matters.com> project).

The events of the Nigerian/Biafra civil war have drawn much scholarly attention both within and outside Nigeria, it has attracted the interest of literary writers, and historians who wanted to know why genocide of yet unprecedented magnitude should be visited by the federal military government of Nigeria on a particular part of the country. The views of some of these scholars who have through their studies tried to find out the remote and immediate causes of the pogrom against the eastern region of Nigeria from 1966 to 1970, and the extent of destruction in terms of human and material resources a few of them will be reviewed here to situate this study.

Lasse Heerten & Dirk Mosses (2014) carried out a study entitled "The Nigerian/Biafra civil war: Post-colonial conflict and the question of genocide". They enumerated the factors that caused the Nigerian-Biafra civil war as follows:

- (i) The British colonial rule divided the Nigerian population along ethnic lines
- (ii) The Nigerian/Biafra war was a sponsored ideology driven ethnic hatred against the easterners the (Igbo) people. The study concluded that the memory of the war remained wrenching in Nigeria and Nigerian Diaspora circle, and that the question of whether genocide was committed constitutes a recurrent bone of contention within the Nigerian society.

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Charles Keil, an American ethnomusicologist qtd in Lasse & Dirk (2014) witnessed the 1966 massacre and lead the chapter to keep Biafra alive at the state university of New York at Buffalo he described the pogrom in Makurdi, Nigeria late September 1966 thus...

“The pogroms I witnessed in Makurdi, in late September 1966 were foreshadowed by months of intensive anti Ibos (sic) and anti -Eastern conversation among Tiv, Idoma, Hausa and other northern residents in Makurdi and fitting a pattern replicated in the city after city, the massacre were led by the Nigerian Army. Before, during and after the slaughter. Col. Gowon could be heard over the radio issuing guarantee of safety to all Easterners, all citizens in Nigeria, but the intent of the soldiers the only power that mattered in Nigeria was painfully clear, after counting the disemboweled bodies along Makurdi road I was escorted back to the city by soldiers, who apologized for the stench and explained politely that they were doing me and the world great favor by eliminating Ibos (sic). “They eat dogs they must die like dogs, we find em, we kill em, and they do us the same, no be so?” They were born with greed in their hearts, they are the only people spoiling Nigeria ever since, one Nigeria without Ibos. We make sure they will never worry us again. Iam paraphrasing the kernel conversation with dozens of soldiers conducted at Night clubs, road blocks and in their barracks during the ten months between the pogroms and July 1967, when I left Nigeria. I meet a few soldiers mostly officers who were convinced that the Ibos were innately evil, expandable, exterminable, but they were exceptional” (p.188).

Adeniran (2002) unambiguously stated that it was “the unabated pogrom which sparked off the Biafran war” (p.102).

Soyinka (2006) collaborating Adeniran, stated the reasons that led to the secession and subsequently the civil war thus:

“It would be a distortion of history and an attempt to trivialize the trauma the Igbo had undergone to suggest-as some commentators tried to do-that it was the lure of the oil wealth that drove them to seek a separate existence. When a people had been subjected to a degree of inhuman violation for which there is no other word but genocide, they have the right to seek an identity different from their aggressors” (p.101).

Joseph C. McKenna (1969) qtd in Lasse & Dirk (2014) while commenting on the inhuman treatment mated to the Igbo people by their Nigerian compatriots’ made a case why he thinks

The Novelist as a Historian: A Study of the Nigerian/Biafran War Account from the Perspective of Chukwuemeka Ikeh's Sunset at Dawn

that the people of the southeastern Nigeria could seek a separate existence from their aggressors. He stated that: "Unable now to feel secure away from their native soil, the Ibos (sic) saw them- selves as the target of genocide. The trauma induced by the September [1966] riots, coming on the heels of the violence in May and July, cannot be overestimated. Secession had become almost inevitable (p.178).

The Times Magazine (23rd August 1968, p. 24) qtd in Emfiena (2013) describes the song chanted by the Hausa soldiers marching off to war thus:

Nigeria (Hausa) "mu je mu kerkeshe su, mu tatara kayan su, mu ber su suna kukan banza"

Nigeria English Translation "We go, we slaughter them, we ravish their precious wares, we abandon them crying useless tears."

It is worthy of note that the war songs chanted by the federal troops dealt not with Nigerian Unity but with the intention of total annihilation and extermination of the Igbo people.

As the war progressed, the chants turned into terrible reality. In captured villages, frontline troops were followed by ragtag "sweepers" from northern Nigeria. They nailed Ibo tribesmen to the walls of their wooden huts, they spray them with automatic-rifle fire or set touches to their cloths. Mop up soldiers raped women, sometimes line up whole village to be shot. The Ibos concluded that the Hausa tribesmen fully intended to use the war to systematically exterminate them (p.115).

During the Nigeria/Biafra civil war several commissions and committees were set up to broker peace between Nigeria government the "aggressor" and the Biafrans (Ibos) the "aggrieved". One of such is Dr. Mensa's International commission report (1969) qtd in Emefiena (2013) the report stated thus:

Documentary evidence abounds in the speeches of northern Nigeria leaders in the regional parliament, by publications in northern Nigeria official newspapers, brochures and magazines of intention to liquidate Biafrans physically as a method of solving a disagreement...Finally I am of the opinion that in many of the cases cited to me, hatred of the Biafrans and a wish to exterminate them was a foremost motivational factor (p.116).

Giwa Amu, a solicitor general and an eye witness of the civil war from inception to the end, writing in the Sunday Observer of March 16th 1983 described how he witnessed the slaughter

of a large number of mid-western Igbo people: “For record purposes, however let me state fearlessly that I saw hundreds of unarmed civilians being shot at sight in Benin city when federal troops arrived to liberate the city from rebels”.

Okocha, (1994) avers that Asaba witnessed most of the abominable atrocities carried out by the federal troops of Nigeria he submits that:

“Some bodies strewn on the part ways were the remains of babies hacked to death from the clutches of their helpless nursing mothers. At the police station my mother instinctively spread her hands and attempted to gather in one spot all her children. She was calling on Jesus and obviously was in and out of hysteria. Suddenly, a boy...I know him...was a student of St. Patrick’s College, Asaba was dragged out and mortally wounded. As he was writhing in agony, he cried is this death? Is this how people die? Please mamma come and help me...Mamma bianu!! Some people help me!! The officer responded. He ordered a Mercedes 411 truck to run over the poor boy” (p.52).

In complete alignment with Okocha’s submission about the Asaba massacre is the views of Elizabeth Bird and Fraser Ottanelli qtd in Lasse &Dirk (2014) they recounted the atrocities committed by the Nigerian troops and unambiguously that:

“The Asaba massacre took place in August 1967 after the Biafran forces had launched a major offensive, crossed the Niger and marched through the Midwestern state towards Lagos. Failing to capitalize on the momentum, the Biafrans came to a halt about 100kms east of the capital and withdrew, after the federal forces retaliated violence against the civilians...they became victims of massacre and rape. They maintained that the memory of the Asaba massacres is still alive although the Nigeria state has repressed publication of the terrible events and its commemoration. For many in Asaba, the memory of the massacre remains painful and stands in the way of inter-ethnic reconciliation” (p.175).

The correspondence of “Time Magazine” 7th October 1966 qtd in Forsyth (1969) reported the massacre of Igbo people in Kano thus:

“The massacre began at the air-port near the fifth battalion’s home city of Kano. A Lagos bound jet had arrived from London, and as the Kano passengers were escorted into the custom shed a willed-eyed soldier stormed in, brandishing a rifle and demanding “ina nyamiri” the Hausa for where are the damned Ibos? (sic). There were Ibos among the custom officers and they dropped their chalk and fled, only to be shot

down at the main terminal by other soldiers. Screaming the blood curses of a Muslim Holy war, the Hausa troops turned the air-port into shambles, bayoneting Ibo workers in the bar, gunning them down and in the corridors, and hauling Ibo passengers off the plane to be lined up and shot. From the airport the troops fanned out through down town Kano, hunting down Ibos in bars, hotels and on the streets. One of the contingents drove their Land Rover to the rail road station where more than one hundred Ibos were waiting for train, and cut them down with automatic weapon fire. The soldiers did not have to do all the killings. They were soon joined by thousands of Hausa civilians, who rampaged through the city armed with stones, cutlasses, machetes, and homemade weapons of metal and broken glasses, crying heathen and Allah. The mob and troops invaded the Sabongari (stranger's quarters) ransacking, looting and burning Igbo homes and stores and murdering their owners. All night long and into the morning the massacre went on. Then tired but fulfilled, the Hausas drifted back to their homes to get some breakfast and sleep. Municipal garbage trucks were sent out to collect the dead and dump them into mass graves outside the city. The death toll will never be known, but it was at least a thousand" (p.78).

To demonstrate that the novelist is not only an imaginative writer but also a historian Chimamanda Adichie in her novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* captured the Kano massacre of the Igbo people using some fictive characters to portray the Kano pogrom. She used the characters of Nnaemeka a young Igbo man and a custom officer at the Kano airport, Richard a Briton who had come to research on the Igbo-ukwu art and the magnificent roped pot, and was staying at the University town of Nsukka, and other Igbo passengers at the Kano airport and Igbo people resident in Kano to depict the mindless killing and destruction of the Igbo people in different parts of northern Nigeria.....

The first soldier waved his gone around. "ina nyamiri! Where are the Igbo people? Who is Igbo here? Where are the infidels? A woman screamed. You are Igbo the second soldier said to Nnaemeka no I come from Katsina. The soldier walked over to him say Allahu Akbar. The lounge was silent. Richard felt cold sweat weighing on his eyelashes. "Say Allahu Akbar" the soldier repeated. Nnaemeka knelt down. Richard saw fear etched so deeply on to his face that it collapsed his cheeks and transfigured him into a mask. He would not say Allahu Akbar because his accent would give him away, the rifle went off and Nnemeka's chest blew open, a splattering red mass, and Richard dropped the note in his hand. Passengers were crouched behind the chairs. Men

got on their knees to lower their heads to the floor. Somebody was shouting in Igbo “my mother, oh my mother oh! God has said no! It was the bartender, one of the soldiers walked up close and shot him and then aimed at the bottles of liquor lined up behind and shot those. The room smelt of whisky, and Campari and gin. There were more soldiers now, more shots, more shouts of “Nyamiri!, and araba, araba!. The soldiers ran out to the tarmac and into the aero-plane and pulled out Igbo people who had already boarded and lined them up and shot them and left them lying there”.(Adichie,2007, p. 175-176)

3. The Novelist as A Historian: Perspectives In Chukwu Emeka Ikeh’s *Sun Set At Dawn*

Chukwuemeka Ikeh in his novel sunset in Biafra presented graphic details of the event of the Nigerian/Biafran war, through various fictive characters, he is able to paint a lucid picture of the period, and depicted the unparalleled suffering of the period which among many others include: air-raids, deaths, social dislocation, hunger and family disintegration, just to mention but a few. The novel is set in Enugu and Obodo, and as the war progressed it changed from one Igbo town to another. The novelist captured the inception of the civil war from the Biafran side when the military governor of the then eastern region of Nigeria Lt Col Chukwuemeka Odimegwu Ojukwu declared the Republic of Biafra on May, 30th 1967. The quintessential novelist Chukwuemeka Ikeh used the family of Doctor, Amilo Kanu to depict the damage done by the first mortar bomb that the Nigerian forces rubbed into Enugu the capital of the then eastern region in September 1967 after declaring full scale war on the Biafrans. Doctor Amilo Kanu before the outbreak of the war was a senior registrar at the University college Ibadan, he is married to a Hausa woman Fatima whom he met in England during his clinical studies, Fatima was a radiography student, they got married and had two sons: Ami junior five years old and his younger brother Emeka, three years old. Doctor Kanu had stayed back in Ibadan even when the supreme commander and head of state of the then united Nigeria Major-General J.T.U Aguiyi Ironsi was murdered by northern Army officers, Doctor Kanu refused coming home because he believes in one united Nigeria, not until his father allowed a telegram announcing his own death sent to him; when he came back he left his wife Fatima and his children in Ibadan, at home he began to see the realities of the struggle and could not go back to Ibadan, his family joined him later. He was made Biafra’s Director of Mobilization and was giving a suite where he stayed with his family at the Enugu progressive hotel with a subsidized meal, it was in the front of their chalet at the progressive hotel that the first mortar bomb caught his first son and teared him into shreds while he was away in the main auditorium of the university of Nigeria Enugu Campus mobilizing youths for a dangerous and precarious

machete offensive in a bid to save Enugu from the advancing federal forces. About ten thousand youths have gathered in the Enugu campus of the University of Nigeria Nsukka, from all the provinces in Biafra to show their solidarity to the war effort. Doctor Kanu stated that the war must be fought to finish even if it means using bare fists! and proceeded to salute the teeming youths.

“Enugu kwenu! ‘Ha’ ‘Portharcourt kwenu’ ‘Aba kwenu’ ‘Ha’, ‘Biafra kwezuenu!’ Ha-a-a!’. Onitsha give us a song! Ready? Go!” (Ike, 1976, p.4)

We shall not... began one of the boys from the Onitsha contingent, everybody joined for everybody know the song by heart, it was one of the war songs otherwise known as song of the revolution We shall not be move!!We shall not, we shall not be moved; Just like a tree planted by the water,

We shall not be moved. (p.4)

Doctor, Kanu was in his mobilization duty when the first mortar rubbed into Enugu, killed his older son, five years old Ami junior, who was standing outside their progressive hotel chalet with his mother waiting for Emeka their three years old son who had gone to the toilet, when Something suddenly landed with a crash on the ring road in front of their chalet almost simultaneously, Fatima heard a whistling sound followed by a split second cry of agony from Ami junior, standing beside her, he was a heap of blood before she could wake up from the nightmare. Fatima broke down completely, when her husband rushed into the chalet which had been their home since December 1966, Fatima was hysteric...

“Here comes’, she cried,’ gallant Biafran! Hero of Biafra’, see whether you can recognize your firstborn son, wrapped up there, if you could have spared just a little time for your son if not for me, if you could have listened to you nagging wife, we would have been out of this mess a long time ago, and Ami junior would not be lying there dead. She slipped down from the pouffe on which she sat and sprawled on the floor weeping her soul out as if this was one moment when she did not care one *anini* about inhibitions”

(Ikeh,1976, p.29).

The novelist used various characters in the Novel to re-cast the fall of Enugu into the hands of the federal forces (Vandals). Mazi Kanu Onwubiko is the father of Doctor Amilo Kanu the Director of Mobilization in Biafra, he is in his country home Obodo in Orumba division, he

had invited his son-in-law Egwuonwu to come and help him repair the leaking roof of his thatched house, his son-in-law had come to do the work in the company of Andrew and two other men, as the work progressed their discussion had been about the war. Mazi Kanu though had been restless and pensive throughout the previous night. Egwuonwu asked whether they have heard anything about the war.

“In-law,’ Egwuonwu began, removing one omu from his lips and tucking it away behind his right ear until he needed it for tying the mat. ‘What is this we hear about Enugu?’ ‘Did you hear anything?’ Mazi Kanu asked stroking his hair which closely resembled lawyer’s wig, without the exotic curls. It is appropriately white for a man in his early seventies but there was no sign of baldness. ‘If you did not hear it then it can’t be true’ What did you hear? I had better put back the omu into my mouth before a soldier arrests me for starting a bush fire with my mouth if Hausa have entered Enugu, Doctor should have run home with his wife and children. ‘May God forbid that we run from Enugu.’ Mazi Kanu prayed. We have run from Nsukka. We have run from Ogoja. We have run from Abakaliki. If we also run from Enugu, to which place shall we run? Please don’t talk about any such things happening, lest the gods act on our words!” Kpulum” exclaimed Egwuonwu let my words return to me! If anybody reports that I ever said such a thing I shall deny it outright”.

(Ikeh, 1976, p.60).

Andrew, one of the workers told them that he heard one Eleazar Nwankwo saying that his brother Peter who works in the Public-works department at Enugu ran home last night. He said that Peter said that no one is left in Enugu.

“I won’t judge with Peter, though’, observed Egwuonwu. ‘He fears More than ijiya. Remember the story he told the first time he ran from Enugu over a month ago. That was even before the Hausa came near Okpatu. He talked of rockets falling inside his neighbors’ bedroom and of enemy shelling machine and ferrets combining to warn every civilian to leave town as they shouted *Kwapu kwapu unu d-um!*” (Ikeh, p.60).

As this discussion continued, Mazi Kanu and his workers saw a Peugeot 404 station wagon pulled in front of Mazi Kanu’s compound, an Army sergeant alighted from the car and asked for the road to Doctor Amilo Kanu’s house. Egwuonwu answered him and told him that they are workers in the compound and did not know anyone that goes by the name he mentioned. Egwuonwu’s response got the sergeant irritated....

“Who de hell you think you fit dribble like football, you bloody fucking idiot?” the sergeant roared at Egwuonwu in pidgin. ‘Officer, don’t be angry’, pleaded Egwuonwu, who saw the sergeant’s anger without understanding his pidgin you people asked us to be vigilant, especially now when we don’t know who is with us ...sharrap there, or I put you for bunker for fourteen days! Me I look like sabo?” (Ikeh,1976, p.63)

Mazi Kanu Onwubiko came out and pleaded with the sergeant on behalf of Egwuonwu and reminded him that they are warned by those of them in the government not to open their mouth wide and talk to strangers, and told him that he is Doctor Kanu’s father and that the place they are is his own house not Doctor Kanu’s house, the sergeant apologized to him, then Mazi Kanu took him to his wife to receive the massage from his son. When Mazi Kanu came out from his wife’s hut Egwuonwu his son in-law was very curious and asked him whether any thing has happened to Doctor Kanu.....

“I did not know I could ever sit in my own house with goat eating palm fronds off my head’. What is it in-law?’ pressed Egwuonwu. Did anything happen to Doctor no, it is my little Amilo. Doctor’s first son, five years and three months. It is him that the Hausa killed yesterday. Just tell me what evil I have ever done to any Hausa man or woman, that they should pursue me to my house and kill a child who does not know his right hand from left. I warned that the marriage to a Hausa girl would bring no good to us. But Doctor attaches no weight to my words. Now my words have come true. In the whole of Enugu, the Hausa people saw nobody else to kill with their shelling-machine except my little grandson Amilo” (p.64-65).

The novelist used the characters of Mrs. Halima Uche and her husband Mr. Uche to vivify the massacre of the Igbo people in different parts of Nigeria especially in the northern cities of Kano, Zaria, Kaduna, Sokoto and Maidugri just to mention a few. Mrs. Halima Uche had come to see Fatima, Doctor Kanu’s wife when she heard about her. Halima is married to her Igbo husband Uche who until he was killed in Zaria in September 1966 was a tally clerk with the Nigerian Railway cooperation. Halima narrated to Fatima Doctor Kanu’s wife how her husband was killed and how she escaped with her two sons and was able to find her late husband’s family members when she and her children escaped from Zaria to Eastern Nigeria...

“My husband, Mr. Uche, was a tally clerk in the Railway Cooperation in Zaria, and we live in the railway quarters when a friend came to warn him that he was on the list of ‘Nyamilis’ to be killed the following day, he asked me to leave immediately with our

two children to the house of my elder sister who was living with her husband in the city, I begged him to come with us, but he refused, saying that our lives would be in a great danger if he come with us. Almost everybody knew him in Zaria, not only as a result of his work but also because he played football very well. I begged him not to stay anywhere near our quarters before I left with our two boys, we had agreed on the best hide out for him. When we left, I feared that it might be the last time we would see him. Events proved me right. My younger brother who had been sent by my elder sister to find out our plans told me that we could not have reached my sister's house in the city before a group of armed soldiers and civilians, carrying a list of Eastern Nigerians they were assigned to kill, rushed into the quarters shouting "where is Mr. Uche, tally clerk come out once!" My husband bolted the door on the inside when he heard the sound. He clambered up the wall, but our quarters had no ceiling to hide him. He must have decided to crawl along the beam of the house into our neighbor's room where he would hide until his assailants had given up the hunt and gone. Unfortunately, our neighbor a chicken-hearted Yoruba man was hiding in his room who fears even his own shadow.....he shouted.....the blood thirsty murderers heard the sound and rushed into the room. My husband crawled back quickly into our own room squeezed himself into the outer wall and jumped out. 'He ran very fast-he is a fast runner-before the soldiers could go after him he had gained a good lead. In fact, according to my brother, he could have escaped alive if his pursuers had not begun firing in his direction and shouting "Catch am nyamili!" Without knowing it my husband ran into another group of murderers who were searching for their own marked men. A shot got him on the stomach and he fell. To punish him for resisting capture the soldiers who had failed to catch him plucked out his two eyes, ripped open his stomach and the left him in the open air to die painfully"Allah so ka" shouted a nauseated Fatima 'Could this really happen at Zaria?' (p.126-128)

Halima also narrated to Fatima how her sister and her husband got secret information that the murderers wanted her two boys because if they are allowed to live they will grow to become "Nyamilis" and suggested to her to give her two boys to the murderers. Fatima was so upset and decided to leave their house. She was however helped by a white pastor who was her husband's friend he brought them safely to Enugu from where she traced her husband's family members who were grateful and accepted her. Halima's story touched Fatima so much that it automatically changed her view about the Biafran struggle...

“I will do all I can to help you,” Fatima finally announced in a subdued tone, as if she still did not quite find her voice. She went into her room and came out with a shirt and a pair of shorts for Halima’s son, and one of her own up-and-down wax prints, a blouse, and underclothes for Halima. ‘I cannot accommodate you here, at least not until I move into our own house,’ she said. “But you’ll eat some food before you go, and I will do my best for you wherever you are. Meanwhile, I’ll send for the chairman of the war council to seek his help in finding you an accommodation” (p.131)

The novelist Chukwuemeka Ikeh used the air raid at Obodo to exemplify the genocidal and merciless strafing and bombing of civilian locations in Biafra by the Nigerian forces (vandals) and their foreign allies. The Obodo air raid had occurred on a peaceful June day, and left the community devastated, such a magnitude of human destruction had not occurred in living memory. An eye witness account of the incident says that a Russian built Ilyushin Jet bomber swooped down noiselessly and left behind scores of deaths. The air raid destroyed prophet James’s church with all the worshippers, including pastor James himself, Halima and her son.

“Prophet James’s thriving church was at one side of the circle and all that remained of it was the red laterite which previously constitute its walls. The thatched roof simply disappeared; nobody could say whether it has ascended into heaven with the prophet or had been burnt without leaving any ashes behind. It was impossible to identify the prophets remains, or tell from the ruins how many worshippers perished in the disaster area turning into one mass grave, about sixty yards from the church, disaster struck a recently completed bungalow, wiping out an entire family-father, mother all the children, except the eldest daughter who had gone to the parsonage to assist in making dry packs for the soldiers” (p.194).

Fatima, Doctor Kanu’s wife is shattered completely after the air raid at Obodo. Halima and her son had been with her in her Feeding Centre not later than two hours before the air raid that destroyed them beyond recognition. She had given Halima enough salt, formula 2, Stock fish, beans, milk, and other relief materials to last them for one week. She also had a terrible nightmare in which her erstwhile suitor Aliyu a medical student in England as at that time, he threatened to kill himself if Fatima refuses to marry him and marry Doctor Kanu. In that dream Fatima saw Aliyu as a co-pilot, in a jet bomber, and he threatened to kill her, her husband and her surviving son. Fatima was so terribly shaken that the only person that can give her the needed companionship is her husband. A day after the Obodo air raid, Fatima had decided to

go to Umuahia on an unscheduled visit to her husband, she had told Luke her orderly, Geoffrey her Army chauffeur and Edna her baby nurse, to get ready for the journey to Umuahia. As they set out for the journey Fatima was surprised to see parts of Biafran towns and villages that seem too far away from the war zone, she saw men women and children moving about, unconcerned. Contrary to the BBC and Radio Nigeria's announcement of final push and final pushes which had made her to believe that Biafra had been over run. She had enquired from Geoffrey the orderly the number of miles that remains to cover before they get to Umuahia, and he politely told her ten miles, and another five miles to Umudike where her husband lives. Suddenly a man riding towards them on a bicycle jumped off his bicycle on the road and made for the bush. A pedestrian pointed to the sky and made for the nearby farm.

The quintessential novelist Chukwu Emeka Ikeh fictionalizes the refugee situation in the eastern part of Nigeria (Biafra) using St. David's refugee camp, formerly St. David's C.M.S school Agu in Orlu division to foreground the hunger, starvation, disease, and death suffered by the people of eastern Nigeria especially the Igbo people. These people have been chased out of their villages and towns by the more superior fire arm of the federal troops, they have no alternative than to find their way to the various refugee camps set up by the Biafran government, where they collect rations of food barely enough to quench the excruciating hunger eating them up. In the refugee camp everyday people die in twos, threes even more in some cases, thus to bury one or two corpses in a day became a normal routine.

“Nobody spoke. A refugee lay dead on the Verandah only yards from the cubicle Mr. Nwosu Had carved out for his family for some privacy...the dead man's corpse was still warm; he could not have been dead for more than an hour or two. He lay on his right side, his face to the wall and his back as it were to the world, to Nigeria and Biafra to a war which he had become oblivious. Close by in the open air about three yards from the end wall of the same building, a man stirs the content of a small earthen pot boiling on the fire, some vegetation collected from the nearest bush, boiling without salt, without pepper, without palm oil. He needed something to supplement his ration of garri. His skin from the waist up looked as if it had received the first coating of white wash....as he walked to and from his pot of boiling vegetable, he hardly took notice of the corpse”(Ikeh, p.324-325).

The situation and the prospect of the Biafrans winning the war has increasingly become very precarious by each day, the war raged on the Biafran soil. Every inch of Biafran soil had become a war front, the Biafran army are losing grounds to the Nigerian forces on a daily basis.

Every child in Biafra feels the impact of the war. The economic blockade is taking its toll in Biafra hundreds of people die on a daily basis. People that die as a result of Kwashiokor outnumbered those killed by bullets. The end of the war came so suddenly and unexpected the date was January 14, 1970 Ikeh, captures these unforgettable day thus...

“Radio Biafra broke the ominous silence. The voice was unmistakable. It was the voice which would have obliterated the entire Nigerian Army at one blow if invectives could kill. It was the voice that had infused hope into Biafrans on many occasions when all hope had appeared lost. It was the same familiar voice, but everything else had suddenly changed as if by magic. No Biafran fanfare. No invectives instead the voice carried an obituary. The Republic of Biafra had been erased from the map. Overnight.....It was instant moulting, for everyone: Akwaelumo, Duke Bassey, Barister Ifeji, Onukaegbu, etcetera. From Biafranism back to Nigerianism. Each person sought his own hideout to bury his discarded Biafran skin” (Ikeh, p.358-359)

4. Conclusion

These researchers have through unbiased and in-depth study of historical books and some novels about the Nigerian/Biafran civil war identified some of the remote causes of the unfortunate incident as follows:

- i. The composition of Nigeria as an artificial country created by the British government and for the interest of the British. Several pre-existing nations were brought together under one nation called Nigeria thus this set the stage for power tussle among the ethnic groups.
- ii. There is also the fear of political and economic domination among the three major ethnic groups viz. Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa.
- iii. There is deep seated ethnic resentment and hatred among the ethnic groups that make up Nigeria, this is clearly manifested in the socio-politico, economic problems that has bedeviled the nation since independence.
- iv. Nigeria is deeply divided along religious and ethnic lines, and this has resulted into the present nepotic political leadership of present day Nigeria.

5. Recommendations

These researchers therefore recommend that Nigeria can be a better country and similar events forestalled if the under listed practical political steps are taken.

- i. All-inclusive government and power devolution.

- ii. Nigerians should shun ethnic and religious sentiments and see themselves as citizens of one united country.
- iii. Political leadership should be based on capability and not one's ethnic group and religion.
- iv. Political leaders should entrench all-inclusive system of leadership.
- v. The enthronement of meritocracy in place of mediocrity, shunning of nepotism that at present holds sway in the country.

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